

Probing solid-liquid interfaces with tender X-rays

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Many important chemical and biological processes occur at the interface between a solid and a liquid, which is difficult to access for chemical analysis. The large inelastic scattering cross section of electrons in the condensed matter makes X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) highly surface sensitive but less sensitive to buried interfaces. This limitation can be overcome by stabilizing an ultrathin layer of liquid with a thickness in the order of a few tens of nanometres and by employing tender X-rays (photon energy ranging between 2-8 keV) that can be used to probe the buried solid-liquid interface. We have recently built and commissioned a new instrument at the Swiss Light Source that combines ambient-pressure XPS with in-situ electrochemistry. With this new setup, we can stabilize a thin liquid layer on a solid surface by a dip&pull method [1], and by using tender X-rays (2-8 keV) from the Phoenix beamline, we can probe the properties and chemistry at the solid-liquid and liquid-gas interface while having a potential control over the ultrathin electrolyte film. The capabilities of this new instrument were demonstrated during the first commissioning beamtime, where we stabilized a thin electrolyte layer (0.1 M KOH) over the Ir(001) electrode. The dip&pull technique was used for the first time using well-defined single-crystalline surfaces (see Supplementary document). Core-level binding energy shifts following the applied potential were observed for species located within the electrolyte film. This included the oxygen 1s level from liquid water, potassium, and, interestingly, also an adventitious carbon species, while the interface was carbon-free. We will present the results from the first commissioning beamtime and outline the future directions we are going to pursue using this new instrument.

[1] S. Axnanda, E. J. Crumlin et al., *Sci. Rep.* 5, 09788 (2014).

Position

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